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"HARMONY OF ACTION"
- SHERMAN AS AN ARMY GROUP COMMANDER -

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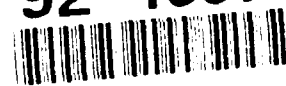
LIEUTENANT COLONEL ALFRED C. CHANNELS JR.
United States Army National Guard

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**"HARMONY OF ACTION" - SHERMAN AS AN ARMY GROUP COMMANDER
AN INDIVIDUAL STUDY PROJECT**

by

Lieutenant Colonel Alfred C. Channels, Jr.
United States Army National Guard

Professor Jay Luvaas
Project Advisor

U.S. Army War College
Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania 17013

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ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Alfred C. Channels, Jr., LTC, USARNG

TITLE: "Harmony of Action" - Sherman as an Army Group Commander

FORMAT: Individual Study Project

DATE: 14 April 1992 PAGES: 33 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

Major General William T. Sherman commanded three field armies under a single command all having the same operational objective. Modern doctrine states that two to five field armies constitute an army group, therefore, by definition, Sherman was an army group commander. General of the Army Omar N. Bradley's actions in forming the 12th Army Group during World War Two, established modern doctrine for field army groups. Bradley chose British Field Marshall Alexander's army group as his model but could have used an American example of this type of organization by studying Sherman and the Atlanta campaign. Sherman has never been looked at before as an army group commander. This study examines Sherman and the Atlanta campaign focusing on the shaping and management of his army group. Command relationships, both personal and professional are investigated through messages, letters and orders of Sherman and his army commanders. This study does not compare Sherman with Bradley nor is it a comparison of him with any other general officer of the Civil War.

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INTRODUCTION

Army groups and army group commanders are usually reminiscent of World War Two, specifically the 12th Army Group. This organization assembled all American ground forces on the continent under then Lieutenant General Omar Nelson Bradley.

On 25 July 1944, General Dwight D. Eisenhower, Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, sent Bradley a memorandum directing

the U.S. ground forces on the Continent be regrouped into the First and Third Armies under the control of the 12th Army Group which General Bradley was to command.¹ General Bradley set 1 August as the date for the new arrangement to get into effect.²

Despite the enormous responsibility, Bradley was comfortable with command of the 12th Army Group. He felt unconstrained by doctrine stating:

Published regulations suggested that an army group should direct but not conduct operations, confining itself to broadly stated 'mission orders'. But these regulations were not binding. I was free, in a tactical sense, to command however I wished. I chose to pattern my administration somewhat on the model set by [Field Marshall Harold R. L. G.] Alexander, who commanded Allied army groups in Tunisia, Sicily and Italy. I would issue broad "missions" but at the same time I would watch the situation very closely and suggest - or order - modification as I thought required, even to the movement of specific divisions. In sum, I would exercise very closest control over Hodges and Patton.³

Today's doctrine for Army groups states

In a mature theater of war where a large number of forces are employed, theater army

commanders...may form army groups to control the operations of two to five field armies. Army group commanders perform major missions for which they usually receive broad operational guidance. They control a variable number of field armies depending on their mission and should also control separate units necessary for their operations.⁴

Bradley chose to model his army group after British General Alexander's Allied army group, yet he need not have relied on foreign examples. Some eighty years earlier, William Tecumseh Sherman commanded an American army organization of this type that was contemporary in its organization and operations. By definition, Sherman commanded an army group.

It was during the Atlanta Campaign that Sherman was an army group commander and conducted operations from May to September 1864 in that capacity. By examining the Atlanta Campaign, it will become clear that Sherman was a modern general and conducted warfare with a thorough understanding of total war. He also had strong organizational skills and a logistics background that proved valuable as commander of large armies. It must be remembered that previously, with the exception of Generals Winfield Scott (Age 75) and John E. Wool (Age 77), no one had commanded troops in large numbers; not even brigade level.

General Grant may be the only other Civil War general who could be considered an army group commander. In examining this theory closer, Grant only functioned briefly as an army group commander at the Battle of Chattanooga. He had two armies under his command during the battle but did not campaign anytime during

the war with two or more field armies that had the same objective and consolidation of command as did Sherman. When Grant went East in March of 1864 to be General-in-Chief of the Armies, he located his headquarters coincidentally with Meade's but did not function at the army group commander level. Grant campaigned with Meade but was in command of all the field armies and was the senior military commander of the Union Army answering to the Secretary of War and the President. Grant was unique in this role, but by definition and position, Grant was not an army group commander.

Sherman was an army group commander and quite frankly, could exist in today's military environment. This paper will attempt to portray Sherman as an Army group commander and to investigate how he led and managed his command. Command relationships, both personal and professional, will therefore be the focus of this treatise. This study is not a comparison of Sherman and General of the Army Omar Nelson Bradley nor of other Civil War generals.

PREPARATION FOR CAMPAIGNING

Major General William Tecumseh Sherman assumed command of the Military Division of the Mississippi on the 18th of March 1864 in Nashville, Tennessee. Under his command were the Departments of the Cumberland, the Ohio, the Tennessee and the Arkansas. Sherman had recently come from the West, serving under

Major General U.S. Grant, as commanding general of the Army of the Tennessee. He succeeded Grant as Commanding General of the Division of the Mississippi and Major General James Birdseye McPherson succeeded Sherman as commander of the Army of the Tennessee. Commanding the Army of the Cumberland was Major General George Henry Thomas and Major General John McAlister Schofield commanded the Army of the Ohio. The Army of the Arkansas, commanded by Major General Frederick Steele was at Little Rock, Arkansas, remote from Sherman, acting in cooperation with General N. P. Banks, commander of the Department of the Gulf, Red River, and was actively engaged. This department was subsequently transferred to the Military Division of the Southwest and served against Mobile. These were the forces Sherman had under him to conduct the "spring campaign" which is better known as the Atlanta Campaign.

Sherman was very much the modern commander of the Civil War. He was a warrior, intellect and a strategist with a clear understanding of the strategic objective of the war. He knew victory could only be achieved by bringing the war to the people and industry of the South, and not by simply destroying the Confederate Army and occupying territory. This was very Clauswitzian in an era when the influence of Jomini and the science of war was prominent.

Sherman, as commander of the Division of the Mississippi was unique from any other commander in the Civil War. He wore "two hats" in this command which no one else did during the war.

First, he was the commander of the Division of the Mississippi which made him responsible for all actions that took place within his area of operation. Geographically, this was a large area that extended from Kentucky, Southwest Virginia, Tennessee to Mississippi, Alabama and Northern Georgia. To manage this division administratively, he established a general headquarters in Nashville and manned it with his chief of staff, Brigadier General J. D. Webster; assistant adjutant general, Major R. M. Sawyer; and assistant adjutant general, Captain Montgomery Rochester. All general orders, official records and other administrative traffic would pass through this headquarters by telegraph to and from Washington, to the army commanders under Sherman's name. This put the execution of administrative responsibilities on the army commanders thus relieving Sherman of routine administrative functions, freeing him to perform the duties of his "second hat". Sherman's "second hat" was that of an army group commander, commanding three armies in the prosecution of the Atlanta campaign. He established a mobile field headquarters, with a minimal staff, where he could command his army group thus providing operational level command to his army commanders. What made this command unique from all others during the Civil War was these three armies; Armies of the Cumberland, Tennessee and Ohio; all had the same objective in this campaign under a single field commander.

Grant sent his strategic intent in his letter of 4 April 1864 to Sherman stating that

It is my design to allow me to take the initiative in the spring campaign to work all parts of the army together and somewhat toward a common center. For your information I now write you my programme as at present determined upon.⁵

Sherman's rapport with Grant was key to his success as an army group commander. They developed a camaraderie early on that was based on trust and confidence in each others abilities. This close relationship is evident in the simplicity of the campaign order Grant gave to Sherman. Sherman's mission, as Grant wrote, was simply stated

You I propose to move against Johnston's army, to break it up and to get into the interior of the enemy's country as far as you can against their war resources. I do not propose to lay down for you a plan of campaign, but simply lay down the work it is desirable to have done, and leave you free to execute in your own way. Submit to me, however, as early as you can, your plan of operations.⁶

Sherman saw the economic objective as well as the military objective in this mission statement. Both Sherman and Grant understood total war and how to conduct it in the modern term. They shared opinions and achievement for one was achievement for both and the Union. Both understood the political implications of the war and this solidified their relationship with President Lincoln.

Sherman was a master at communication, both oral and written. Sherman also communicated with maps. As a young officer, he sailed from New York via Rio de Janeiro to California. He would write detailed letters to his wife Ellen

and draw maps so she could visualize where he had travelled. He continued to use maps extensively whenever he could get them. (Even though the Civil War was fought in our own country, no one had maps that were of any tactical value.) During the Atlanta campaign, he used topographic engineers to produce maps under the direction of his chief engineer, CPT O. M. Poe, U.S. Engineers. Special Field Order No. 15 dated 31 May, 1864 stated "No Topographical Engineer shall be employed as an Aide-de-Camp, or in any other duty other than making purely military surveys."⁷

When Grant outlined the Atlanta campaign for Sherman, he also had a map sent. Sherman was excited with the map, and in a confidential letter to Colonel C. B. Comstock of Grant's Staff in Washington, remarked about the clarity of ideas derived from it.

That map, to me, contains more information and ideas than a volume of printed matter. From that map I see all, and glad am I that there are minds now in Washington able to devise; and for my part, if we can keep our counsels I believe I have the men and ability to march square up to the position assigned me and hold it.⁸

Sherman also spoke to strategic aspect of his campaign and Grant's campaign in the East in the same letter.

Concurrent action is the thing. It would be wise that the general, through you or some educated officer, should give me timely notice of all contemplated movements, with all details that can be foreseen. I now know the results aimed at. I know my base and have a pretty good idea of my lines of operation. No time shall be lost in putting my forces in mobile condition, so that all I ask is notice of time, that all over the grand theater of war there shall be simultaneous action. We saw the beauty of time in the battle of Chattanooga, and there

is no reason why the same harmony of action should not pervade a continent.'

Harmony of action is the key phrase Sherman uses; not only for the Atlanta campaign but also for the campaign in the East. Keeping Johnston's army in the West engaged prevents reinforcement to Lee's army in the East as both campaigns unfold. Harmony of action is Sherman's words but translating to modern terms, the strategic commander (Grant) and the operational commanders (Sherman and Meade) agreed to the conditions that constitute a clear objective or end state which is preventing the two Confederate armies from reinforcing the other in each of the campaigns.

COMMAND RELATIONSHIPS

Harmony of action in the Union army was now possible with Grant in the East and Sherman in the West. This was Sherman's intent as he prepared for the Atlanta campaign. Shortly after assuming command, Sherman travelled out to his armies to make contact with his commanders and to discuss the upcoming campaign. By the end of March 1864, Sherman had McPherson, Thomas and Schofield together at Chattanooga. Sherman was a thinker and a talker and liked to "kick around" ideas and concepts with his army commanders. He also had polished "people skills", that is, knowing his army commanders and how to get the best performance

out of them and knowing how to deal with his superiors, especially Grant.

We had nothing like a council of war, but conversed freely and frankly on all matters of interest then in progress or impending. We all knew that, as soon as spring was fairly open, we should have to move directly against our antagonist, General Jos. E. Johnston, then securely intrenched at Dalton, thirty miles distant; and the purpose of our conference was to ascertain our own resources, and to distribute to each part of the army its appropriate share of work. We discussed every possible contingency likely to arise, and I simply instructed each army commander to make immediate preparations for a hard campaign, regulating the distribution of supplies that were up by rail from Nashville as equitably as possible.¹⁰

This meeting of the commanders is a clear example of Sherman, as a modern commander, translating Grant's strategic aims into military operational-level objectives, assuring his army commanders understand his intent as the army group (operational-level) commander.

Sherman had the utmost confidence in his army commanders and knew he could conduct an active campaign.

In Generals Thomas, McPherson, and Schofield, I had three generals of education and experience, admirably qualified for the work before us. Each has made a history of his own, and I need not here dwell on their respective merits as men, or as commanders of armies, except that each possessed special qualities of mind and character which fitted them in them in the highest degree for the work then in contemplation.¹¹

George Henry Thomas, commander of the Army of the Cumberland, was a West Point graduate of the class of 1840 and a classmate of Sherman. He was commissioned a second lieutenant of

artillery and, unlike Sherman, served continuously throughout his career. Thomas served with the Third Artillery until December, 1853, distinguishing himself at Monterey and Buena Vista during the Mexican War. He served in the West as a Captain of artillery until May of 1855 when he was appointed a Major and served with the Second Cavalry, becoming its Colonel in May of 1861. Thomas became Colonel of the Second Cavalry following the resignation of Albert Sidney Johnston, a Texan who would command Confederate cavalry. This is where Brigadier General Robert Anderson found Thomas at the outbreak of the war.

Anderson had been asked to command the Army of the Cumberland and the President offered to allow him to choose his own brigade commanders. Thomas, Sherman, Buell and Burnside were his choices. Lincoln had no problem with these officers save one, Thomas. Thomas was a native Virginian and in view of the strong state allegiance exhibited by other Virginians such as Lee, Lincoln questioned his loyalty. It was Sherman who emphatically indorsed his appointment to brigadier general and stating Thomas' loyalty was with the Union. Lincoln, hearing this, promised Anderson the appointments which he subsequently did. Thomas served in the Army of the Cumberland throughout the war, eventually becoming its commanding general. His association with the Army of the Cumberland was such that Thomas and the Army of the Cumberland became synonymous.

Sherman always depended on Thomas, considering him reliable and steady in combat but somewhat slow. Even though the Army of

the Cumberland was bigger (60,773) than the Armies of the Tennessee (24,465) and the Ohio (13,559), Sherman always felt Thomas was slow in his movements. Sherman commented on Thomas' slowness numerous times to Halleck and Grant. It is obvious that Sherman was frustrated with the responsiveness the Army of the Cumberland throughout the Atlanta campaign.

John McAllister Schofield, commander of the Army of the Ohio, graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1853. Schofield was commissioned in artillery and served in the South before accepting a position as an assistant professor of natural and experimental philosophy at West Point from 1855 to 1860. From 1860 until the outbreak of the war, Schofield taught physics at Washington University of St. Louis, whereupon he became the mustering officer for Missouri. He participated in operations in Missouri and in November 1861, was appointed brigadier general of volunteers and Missouri militia. He assumed command of the Missouri militia in November 1862 and was promoted to major general of volunteers.

Schofield successively commanded the Missouri militia, 1861-62, the Army of the Frontier 1862-1863, Third Division of XIV Corps, 1863, the Department of the Missouri, 1863-1864 and the Army of the Ohio 1864-1865. During the Atlanta Campaign, the Army of the Ohio was actually XXII Corps redesignated by Sherman. By doing this, Sherman put Schofield on an equal command level with Thomas and McPherson thus eliminating seniority problems within the army group.

Sherman felt Schofield was competent and could do his job as commander. He wasn't overly impressed with Schofield but throughout the campaign, the Army of the Ohio did its job. Sherman found Schofield slow at times but adequate as a commander. This is not meant as an indictment of Schofield as Sherman was never overly complimentary to his commanders. By virtue of their position and rank, Sherman expected selfless, proficient performance as he did of himself.

James Birdseye McPherson, commander of the Army of the Tennessee, graduated first in his class at West Point in 1853. Among McPherson's classmates were Philip H. Sheridan, James Bell Hood and John M. Schofield. He was commissioned in the Corps of Engineers, serving on both coasts, working with harbor and seacoast defense and supervised the fortification of Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay. McPherson was a first lieutenant of engineers in August 1861 and by October 1862, a major general of volunteers commanding a division of XIII Corps. Previously, he had served as aide-de-camp to Henry W. Halleck and as chief engineer to U.S. Grant during the campaign of Forts Henry and Donelson, the battle of Shiloh, the advance on Corinth and as superintendent of railways in West Tennessee. During the Vicksburg campaign, McPherson commanded XVIII Corps and fought with distinction, winning the praise of both Grant and Sherman. When Sherman assumed command of the Division of the Mississippi from Grant, McPherson succeeded Sherman as commander of the Army of the Tennessee.

Sherman and Grant both saw McPherson's meteoric rise and saw him as the future leader of the Army. Sherman saw the brightness of this rising star and became his mentor, understanding that some day, both he and Grant would probably be subordinate to McPherson! Having commanded the Army of the Tennessee, Sherman had a genuine fondness for the army and its commander. Success and glory in the Atlanta campaign was assured with the best trained army as part of Sherman's army group.

LOGISTICS

Sherman had the army commanders he felt necessary to conduct the Atlanta campaign but the major problem facing his army group was supplying this operation. Lines of communications would have to stretch from Nashville, his base depot, to Chattanooga and beyond to Atlanta as the campaign progressed. Sherman also had to consider the distance from St. Louis, the main source of supplies, to Nashville. Distance was the first problem to be overcome.

St. Louis was 185 miles from Nashville and Chattanooga lies 151 miles from Nashville. Sherman planned extensive use of the railroad to support his army group numbering 98,700 men and 254 artillery pieces. Sustaining a force of this size would be a formidable task but Sherman was up to the challenge. He had already talked to his army commanders regarding this issue and took measures as the army group commander to control the

railroads under his headquarters in order to assure all three armies received their fair share of supplies and provisions. The Army of the Cumberland had previously enjoyed a relatively unrestricted use of the railroads and even allowed the civilian populace to ship goods and cotton. Sherman published General Order No. 6 which established regulations on the utilization of the railroads to support the armies in the field. This extensive order outlined details that included who, what and when could be transported by rail. The order also established a general manager of the railroads to control the trains. This measure was another example of Sherman assuring "harmony of action".

Early on, Sherman telegraphed General Montgomery C. Meigs, Quartermaster-General, asking for a general officer from his department to assist in the massive task at hand.

General: I ought to have an officer from your department with me whose power is co-extensive with my own, whom I can freely converse with, explain plans, figures, reports, and everything. You saw enough out here to know that a general commanding should have such a quartermaster close by him all the time to direct the harmonious working of the vast machinery.¹²

Sherman sent a similar message to General J. P. Taylor, Commissary-General asking for an officer and, again, describing the "harmonious working of the whole machine".¹³ Meigs responded immediately to Sherman and agreed to allow an officer to be utilized as chief quartermaster under Sherman's command. By this action, Sherman again divested himself of routine staff requirements so he could direct his attention to the operational

level of the impending campaign.

Another problem confronting Sherman would be the protection of this narrow, vital line of communication. With the distance involved, Sherman would have to constantly patrol these lines and would have to establish garrisons along the railroads as the campaign progressed into Georgia. Responsibilities in maintaining these vital LOCs would fall to the army commanders. Sherman, as army group commander, would prioritize supplies that armies should have on hand and carry on their own. This action again would streamline the operation and put the responsibility on the army commanders to implement the supply procedures.

Operationally, Sherman saw the logistics problem as a risk that could jeopardize the success of the campaign. Typically, by deliberate planning with his army commanders and by establishing centralized controls and regulations at the army group level, Sherman reduced the risk to the point of a workable logistics plan that could be supported with execution responsibility decentralized to the army commander level. Meticulous and continuous planning replaced risk taking which was unmistakably a Sherman trait, but even this was not left to chance.

Sherman, the strategist, always had "Plan B", that is, another alternative, ready to implement if the situation went awry. Sherman's lines of communications could be cut so he "obtained and analyzed census and taxation returns whereby to calculate the populations and resources of every county in Georgia."¹⁴ The people of Georgia lived off the land and, as

Sherman assured Grant,

If they can live, we should not starve. If the enemy interrupt my communications, I will be absolved from all obligations to subsist on our own resources, but will feel perfectly justified in taking whatever and whenever I can find. I will inspire my command, if successful, with my feeling that beef and salt are all that is absolutely necessary to life, and parched corn fed General Jackson's army once on that very ground.¹⁵

Other commanders might not have dwelt on the logistics problem with the intensity and thoroughness as Sherman did. Sherman saw the importance of a strong logistics base and operation while serving with Grant at Vicksburg. Sherman also understood his role as the operational level commander and that he must commit forces to protect and defend lines of communication as this vital lifeline lengthens during the campaign. Quartermasters and commissaries will operate the system, but a planned portion of the fighting force must be made available to keep the line open. Sherman assigned these responsibilities to his army commanders but was always reassessing how this mission impacted on the overall warfight of the campaign.

Sherman kept his finger on the pulse of the logistics tempo and throughout the campaign, he would issue specific orders to his army commanders on this most important matter.

The "feeding" of an army is a matter of the most vital importance, and demands the earliest attention of the general intrusted with a campaign. To be strong, healthy, and capable...the soldier needs about three pounds gross of food per day, and the horse or mule about twenty pounds. When a general

first estimates the quantity of food and forage needed for an army of fifty or one hundred thousand men, he is apt to be dismayed, and here a good staff is indispensable, though the general cannot throw off on them the responsibility. He must give the subject his personal attention, for the army reposes in him alone, and should never doubt the fact that their existence overrides in importance all other considerations.¹⁶

Having served in the Commissary Department almost fifteen years earlier, Sherman had an appreciation of the overwhelming task in keeping adequate levels of provisions flowing to his armies.

The stores came forward daily, but I endeavored to have on hand a full supply for twenty days in advance. These stores were habitually in the wagon-trains, distributed to corps, divisions, and regiments, in charge of experienced quartermasters and commissaries, and became subject to the orders of the generals commanding these bodies. They were generally issued on provision returns, but these had to be closely scrutinized, for too often the colonels would make requisitions for provisions for more men than they reported for battle. Of course, there are always a good many non-combatants with an army, but, after careful study, I limited their amount to twenty-five per cent. of the "effective strength," and that was found to be liberal.¹⁷

The number of wagons needed for an army group of this size could be overwhelming, clogging roads and impeding the advance of troops. Sherman took everything into consideration including commanders not being watchful of what was carried in the wagons and how much an individual soldier on the march should carry.

...all trains should have escorts to protect them, and to assist them in bad places. To

this end there is nothing like actual experience, only, unless the officers in command give the subject their personal attention, they will find their wagon-trains loaded down with tents, personal baggage, and even the arms and knapsacks of the escort. Each soldier should... carry his musket and equipments containing forty to sixty rounds of ammunition, his shelter-tent, a blanket or overcoat, and an extra pair of pants, socks, and drawers, in the form of a scarf, worn from the left shoulder to the right side in lieu of knapsack, and in his haversack he should carry some bread, cooked meat, salt, and coffee. I do not believe a soldier should be loaded down too much, but, including his clothing, arms, and equipment, he can carry about fifty pounds without impairing his health or activity. A simple calculation will show that by such a distribution a corps will thus carry the equivalent of five hundred wagon-loads - an immense relief to the trains.¹⁸

Today's operational-level logistical doctrine states:

Support of the force at the operational-level includes balancing current consumption with the need to build up support for subsequent major operations, lengthening lines of communications (LOCs), and staging of support forward as required to sustain the tempo of operations.¹⁹ To meet these challenges, the senior Army commander must effectively apply the five fundamental imperatives: anticipation, integration, continuity, responsiveness, and improvisation.²⁰

Although Sherman did not have doctrine as stated above to follow, his logistical planning and execution employed the fundamental imperatives of modern operational support during the Atlanta campaign.

THE CAMPAIGN

Sherman had detailed his campaign plans in a letter to Grant on 10 April 1864. Grant approved these plans in a letter to Sherman carried by Colonel Comstock on 19 April telling Sherman

...I have seen no reason to change any portion of the general plan of campaign, if the enemy remain still and allow us to take the initiative. I think Saturday the 30th, will probably be the day for our general move.²¹

Sherman moved to the field on the 28th of April to prepare for movement against Johnston. Grant changed the date for simultaneous advance to the 5th of May, which bought some time to get Schofield and McPherson into position. When Sherman established his field headquarters, he did so with only necessary personnel and equipment. He did this to set the example for his army commanders, especially Thomas, who always carried ample organizational impedimenta to enjoy maximum comfort while in the field.

No wall-tents were allowed, only the flies. Our mess establishment was less in bulk than that of any brigade commander; nor was this from an indifference to the ordinary comforts of life, but because I wanted to set the example, and gradually convert all parts of that army into a mobile machine, willing and able to start at a minute's notice, and subsist on the scantiest food.²²

On the 7th of May, Thomas and the Army of the Cumberland advanced against Tunnel Hill with no resistance except for a picket-guard that was driven off. From Tunnel Hill, Sherman could see the gorge called the Buzzard Roost. Beyond the gorge

was Dalton, strongly fortified by Joseph Johnston and his army, having been in occupation for six months. Schofield had moved from Red Clay and was closing on Johnston's right front.

Therefore I had no intention to attack the position seriously in front, but depended on McPherson to capture and hold the railroad to its rear, which would force Johnston to detach largely against him, or rather, as I expected, to evacuate his position at Dalton altogether. My orders to Generals Thomas and Schofield were merely to press strongly at all points in front, ready to rush in on the first appearance of "let go," and, if possible, to catch our enemy in the confusion of retreat.²³

McPherson's mission was to move South, through Snake Creek Gap, to capture and hold the railroad to Johnston's rear at Resaca. On the 9th of May, McPherson pushed the Army of the Tennessee through Snake Creek Gap, unopposed with complete surprise. Thomas had suggested to Sherman that the Army of the Cumberland, with its substantial combat power in comparison to McPherson's army, was the only way to achieve success in this maneuver. Sherman had the utmost confidence in McPherson and the Army of the Tennessee in achieving the necessary surprise and did not want Thomas to try this maneuver because of the size of his army and would probably move too slow. Sherman was in constant communication with all the armies, and as McPherson first elements entered and passed through Snake Creek Gap, he renewed orders to Thomas and Schofield to be ready for instant pursuit when Johnston breaks from Dalton. Later, McPherson sent a message to Sherman that he found Resaca too strong to assault and fell back into Snake Creek Gap and fortified his position.

McPherson had startled Johnston in his fancied security, but had not done the full measure of his work. He had in hand twenty-three thousand of the best men of the army, and could have walked into Resaca (then held only by a small brigade), or he could have placed his whole force astride the railroad above Resaca, and there have easily withstood the attack of all of Johnston's army, with the knowledge that Thomas and Schofield were on his heels. Had he done so, I am certain that Johnston would have not ventured to attack him in position,...and we should have captured half his army and all his artillery and wagons at the very beginning of the campaign. Such an opportunity does not occur twice in a single life, but at the critical moment McPherson seems to have been a little cautious. Still, he was perfectly justified by his orders, and fell back and assumed an unassailable defensive position in Sugar Valley, on the Resaca side of Snake-Creek Gap.²⁴

Sherman was disappointed with McPherson's "caution" because surprise had been attained and Johnston could have easily been pushed out of Dalton. He knew the fighting spirit of McPherson and the Army of the Tennessee, because just a scant few months prior, Sherman had been their commander and McPherson was a corps commander. Sherman's strategy was brilliant in this maneuver and success for McPherson and the Army of the Tennessee would have made them immortal, but this was a lost opportunity that would not come again. Sherman did not hold this against McPherson, but for the rest of the campaign, his orders to McPherson were detailed and quite explicit. An example of this detail and how Sherman used maps to communicate with his commanders was contained in a message to McPherson soon after the action at Snake Creek Gap.

I wish you to select near the *debouche* [mouth of the creek] a strong impregnable position, such as this country abounds in, and fortify and strengthen it by fallen timbers and rifle-pits. I have sent one of Hooker's divisions to you; you should post them in support, with one regiment on the mountain to the east of the gap, not far from the letter "M" or "O" in the word "mountain" east of Villanow.²⁵

The indirect approach going through Snake Creek Gap, into Johnston's rear, was indicative of Sherman and how he maneuvered his army group. He utilized Thomas as his maneuver base because of the large size of the Army of the Cumberland and its ability to move deliberately and to fix an opposing force. With McPherson and Schofield as his other maneuver elements, Sherman was able to orchestrate movement for the army group. Although Sherman always felt Thomas was slow, the Army of the Cumberland was reliable and could handle a fight. Sherman constantly evaluated his armies and their commanders as he progressed with the campaign. Halleck was telegraphed daily on the progress of the Atlanta campaign so Grant could be informed of Sherman's actions. Every so often, Sherman would write a letter to Grant that explained details on a personal basis rather than an official document. Grant appreciated this confidence and it gave Sherman an outlet for his frustration.

If our movement has been slower than you calculated I can explain the reason, though I know you believe me too earnest and impatient to be behind time. My first movement against Johnston was really fine, and now I believe I would have disposed of him at one blow if McPherson had crushed Resaca, as he might have done, for then it was garrisoned only by a small brigade, but Mc. was a little over

cautious lest Johnston, still at Dalton, might move against him alone; but the truth was I got all of McPherson's army, 23,000, eighteen miles to Johnston's rear before he knew they had left Huntsville. With that single exception McPherson has done very well.²⁶

Sherman continues, discussing other army commanders and the lack of effectiveness of his cavalry divisions.

Schofield also does as well as I could ask with his small force. Our cavalry is dwindling away. We cannot get full forage and have to graze, so that the cavalry is always unable to attempt anything. Garrard [Brigadier General Kenner Garrard, Cavalry division attached to Thomas' Army of the Cumberland] is over-cautious and I think Stoneman [Major General George Stoneman, Cavalry division attached to Schofield's Army of the Ohio] is lazy. The former has 4,500 and the latter about 2,500. Each has had fine chances of cutting in but were easily checked by appearance of an enemy.²⁷

Even this is not critical for Sherman. He presses his commanders to get maximum results in the same manner he presses himself.

Sherman's real frustration during the Atlanta campaign is Thomas and the Army of the Cumberland.

My chief source of trouble is with the Army of the Cumberland, which is dreadfully slow. A fresh furrow in a plowed field will stop the whole column, and all begin to intrench. I have again and again tried to impress on Thomas that we must assail and not defend; we are the offensive, and yet it seems the whole Army of the Cumberland is so habituated to be on the defensive that, from its commander down to the lowest private, I cannot get it out of their heads. I came without tents and ordered all to do likewise, yet Thomas has a headquarters camp on the style of Halleck at Corinth; every aide and orderly with a wall-tent, and a baggage train big enough for a division. He promised to send it all back, but the truth is everybody

there is allowed to do as he pleases, and they still think and act as though the railroad and all its facilities were theirs. This slowness has cost me the loss of two splendid opportunities which never recur in war.²⁸

As the campaign progressed, even with Sherman's criticality, the armies were successful in pushing towards Atlanta. Terrain was difficult and the management of supplies remained a major challenge but Sherman was in constant communications with his army commanders, Grant and Halleck in the East, and his staff in supporting the campaign. He moved around the area of operations, shaping the campaign and maintaining operational command and control. Sherman and his field headquarters published operations orders, called "special field orders", throughout the campaign to assure the harmony of action in the area of operations. His use of maps were key in the operational aspect of the campaign as well as the tactical level.

The base map of northern Georgia was altered daily as new information became available. It was then cut into sixteen sections and divided among the draughtsmen, who worked in shifts to trace each section on thin paper in autographic ink. As soon as four adjacent sections could be completed they were transferred to large lithographic stone and 200 copies were printed. Each of the three army commanders received a bound copy, and before the campaign was underway every corps, division and brigade commander was issued the map. Copies for the cavalry were printed on muslin so that they could be washed whenever soiled and would not be damaged by hard service. For the same reason infantry and staff officers often had copies printed on handkerchiefs. All told, Sherman's map department produced 4,000 copies of campaign maps. In his official report Sherman acknowledged his debt to Poe and the

topographical engineers for providing the necessary maps and information that finally enabled him to live up to his own ideal - complete military success "by united action" on a general plan.²⁹

As stated previously, Sherman did not have doctrine to guide him in organizing and conducting a campaign with his army group. AirLand Battle doctrine of today describes how the Army will generate and apply combat power at the operational and tactical level.

...operational planning must orient on decisive objectives. It must stress flexibility, the creation of opportunities to fight on favorable terms by capitalizing on enemy vulnerabilities, concentration against enemy centers of gravity, synchronized joint operations, and aggressive exploitation of tactical gains to achieve operational results. Success on the battlefield will depend on...four basic tenets: initiative, agility, depth, and synchronization.³⁰

Examination of the Atlanta campaign and the tenets of AirLand Battle show that Sherman applied these basic principles with expertise and success.

Sherman attacked Johnston at Resaca on the afternoon of the 15th of May. A heavy battle took place and during the night, Johnston retreated South.

Late on the 17th his [Johnston's] rear guard was overtaken near Adairsville, and heavy skirmishing followed. The next morning, however, he had again disappeared. He was vigorously pursued and was overtaken at Cassville on the 19th, but, during the ensuing night, retreated across the Etowah. ...Sherman having given his army a few days' rest...again put it in motion on the 23d for Dallas, with a view of turning the difficult pass at Allatoona. On the afternoon of the 25th the advance...had a severe battle with

the enemy, driving him back to New Hope Church, near Dallas. Several sharp encounters occurred at this point. The most important was on the 28th, when the enemy assaulted General McPherson at Dallas, but received a terrible and bloody repulse.³¹

Johnston had abandoned his positions at New Hope Church, moving to strong positions at Kenesaw mountain. Thomas and McPherson assaulted these positions on the 27th of June and were unsuccessful in dislodging Johnston's army. Sherman did not like direct assaults on fortified positions and continued to extend his flanks.

On the night of the 2d of July Sherman commenced moving his army by the right flank, and on the morning of the 3d found that the enemy, in consequence of this movement, had abandoned Kenesaw and retreated across the Chattahoochee.³²

Sherman chose not to pursue across the Chattahoochee to give his armies a rest and to allow stores to get up to them. He resumed operations on the 17th of July, crossing the Chattahoochee, destroying most of the railroad to Augusta, forcing Johnston back to Atlanta. At this point, General James Bell Hood succeeded Johnston as the commander of the Confederate Army of the Tennessee, who immediately launched

several severe attacks upon Sherman in the vicinity of Atlanta, the most desperate and determined of which was on the 22d of July. About 1 p.m. of this day the brave, accomplished, and noble-hearted McPherson was killed.³³

Hood and McPherson were classmates at West Point, both members of the class of 1853. McPherson ranked first in the class and eleven years later, the battle orders of Hood resulted in

McPherson's death in an isolated woods near Atlanta.

The sudden loss of McPherson was a heavy blow to Sherman. His feelings for McPherson was quite evident in a letter Sherman wrote to Thomas.

It is my painful duty to report that Brig. Gen. James B. McPherson, U.S. Army, major-general of volunteers and commander of the Army of the Tennessee in the field, was killed by a shot from ambuscade about noon of yesterday. ...General McPherson fell in battle, booted and spurred, as the gallant knight and gentleman should wish. Not his the loss, but the country's, and the army will mourn his death and cherish his memory as that of one who, though comparatively young, had risen by his merit and ability to the command of one of the best armies which the nation had called into existence to vindicate its honor and integrity. History tells us of but few who so blended the grace and gentleness of the friend with the dignity, courage, faith, and manliness of the soldier. His public enemies, even the men who directed the fatal shot, ne'er spoke or wrote of him without expressions of marked respect; those whom he commanded loved him even to idolatry, and I, his associate and commander, fail in words adequate to express my opinion of his great worth.³⁴

Not only did Sherman see McPherson as a great warrior, he also felt McPherson could have been the man to lead the nation into peace.

I feel assured that every patriot in America on hearing this sad news will feel a sense of personal loss and the country generally will realize that we have lost not only an able military leader but a man who, had he survived, was qualified to heal the national strife which has been raised by ambitious and designing men.³⁵

Sherman immediately requested Maj. Gen. Oliver Otis Howard, a corps commander under Thomas, to succeed McPherson as commander

of the Army and Department of Tennessee. Maj. Gen. John A. Logan assumed command during the interim before Washington's approval of Howard. Sherman sent a message to Logan outlining the current situation and what was expected of the Army of the Tennessee. The other purpose was to bolster and to give him assurance and confidence as he assumed command.

Act with confidence. Know that the enemy cannot budge you from your present ground, and act offensively to show him that you dare him to the encounter. You can understand that being on the defensive he cannot afford to sally unless at great peril. Go on breaking that road good.³⁶

On the 26th of July, Sherman received a message from Halleck approving Howard as the commander of the Army of the Tennessee. Howard fought well and inflicted great losses on the enemy as the attacks were repulsed.

Finding it impossible to entirely invest the place, General Sherman, after securing his line of communications across the Chattahoochee, moved his main force round by the enemy's left flank upon the Montgomery and Macon roads, to draw the enemy from his fortifications. In this he succeeded, and after defeating the enemy near Rough and Ready, Jonesborough, and Lovejoy's, forcing him to retreat to the south, on the 2d of September occupied Atlanta, the objective point of his campaign.³⁷

Sherman, in his after-action report, gave the success of the Atlanta campaign to his three army commanders.

My three armies in the field were commanded by able officers, my equals in rank and experience-Maj. Gen. George H. Thomas, Maj. Gen. J. M. Schofield, and Maj. Gen. O. O. Howard. With such commanders, I had only to indicate the object desired and they accomplished it. I cannot overestimate their

services to the country, and must express my deep and heartfelt thanks that coming together from different fields, with different interests, they have co-operated with a harmony that has been productive of the greatest amount of success and good feeling. A more harmonious army does not exist.³⁸

Grant's assessment of the Atlanta campaign was not as eloquent as Sherman's accolade to his army commanders, but its straight forward language gets the point across.

General Sherman's movement from Chattanooga to Atlanta was prompt, skillful, and brilliant. The history of his flank movements and battles during that memorable campaign will ever be read with an interest unsurpassed by anything in history.³⁹

CONCLUSION

Sherman and the Atlanta campaign is memorable as described by General Grant and takes a prominent position in history. Sherman was a modern commander and an army group commander as previously described. Sherman knew his commanders, understood his mission and knew what it would take to accomplish his mission. He was a logistician, a strategist at both the operational and strategic levels and foremost, a warrior. To read military history and study Sherman is to study modern leadership and modern warfare. He was on the "leading edge" of technology in his day, being the first commander to use the railroads and telegraph extensively to assure "harmony of action". Sherman seemed to be a great captain ahead of his time,

when in fact, it is he, and others like Grant and Lee, who laid down the principles of modern doctrine by their actions and combat maneuvers.

Today's military leader can gain tremendous insight to the operational level of war by studying Sherman and the Atlanta campaign. His meticulous planning, thorough preparation and brilliant execution gives shape to today's AirLand Battle doctrine and exemplifies the tenets of initiative, agility, depth and synchronization. The principles of campaign planning can be "lifted" directly from the Atlanta campaign. Modern technology and weapons systems have changed since the Civil War but the overall leadership and warfighting principles have not and that is what qualifies Sherman as a modern commander when compared to other commanders throughout history. Time spent studying Sherman and the Civil War is time well spent and will enhance professional development at the operational level of war.

ENDNOTES

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